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OLC 71-0277

23 April 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with Chairman George Mahon Regarding Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty

1. This morning Mr. Cord Meyer, ADDP, and I joined David Abshire, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, and Mr. John Baker, Coordinator of the Task Force on Radio Free Europe in State, in a meeting with Chairman Mahon and Ralph Preston, House Appropriations Committee staff, regarding the future of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Mr. Abshire explained plans for the introduction of legislation setting up an American Council for Private International Communications, operating with funds appropriated by Congress, which would grant financial support to private organizations engaged in communications with foreign peoples. Chairman Mahon responded with a quite emphatic explanation of reasons why RFE and RL should not be funded by CIA for Fiscal Year 1972, making the following points:

a. In recent years he and a small group within his Committee has been subject to increasing pressure by the Committee membership to open up CIA activities for discussion within the Committee.

b. At this time such pressure has reached unprecedented intensity, with some of the younger members of the Committee attempting to expose and discredit the activities not only of CIA but the FBI, Defense Department, and other sensitive Executive agencies.

c. In these circumstances, it would be extremely dangerous to run the risk of including the Radios in the Agency FY 1972 budget, since they could provide a device by which the whole question of the handling of the CIA budget in the previously restrictive manner could be opened up for debate within the Committee, and eventually perhaps within the Congress as a whole.

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d. If this should happen, Chairman Mahon would be seriously concerned that the security and effectiveness of CIA and other sensitive agencies might suffer irreparable damage.

2. In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Preston and Chairman Mahon both questioned the value of RFE and RL in present circumstances, but did not belabor this point. They did feel, however, that there was serious doubt as to whether the kind of legislation proposed could pass both the House and Senate. Chairman Mahon also noted that the feelings he expressed regarding the problem of including the Radios in the Agency FY 1972 budget would be equally serious on the Senate side, where Chairman Ellender undoubtedly shared the same kind of feelings as did Mahon.

3. In conclusion it was agreed the best solution would be to move as rapidly as possible to get the necessary legislation, authorization and appropriations through in time to become effective this summer. It was noted that the end of the Fiscal Year was not necessarily a decisive deadline since the Radios could be sustained under a continuing resolution until the new Defense appropriations bill was passed by the House, which probably would not be until late July. Mr. Abshire commented that in view of this, we would proceed as rapidly as possible to get the support of the House and Senate leadership to expedite the passage of the legislation in question.

4. In parting, Mr. Abshire said he would try to set up a meeting for us all to see Speaker of the House Albert the first of next week.

5. Mr. Meyer and I later had a few minutes with Mr. Preston who said he was sure the Chairman would not interpose any objection to the legislation we propose, but he reaffirmed the strong feeling of the Chairman and himself that we could not afford the risk of the Radios in the FY 1972 budget. 25X1A

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